



HIGHLIGHTS FOR TALK 9

HOW CHRIST SUPPORTS MY STRUGGLE: THE SACRAMENTS

- ❖ A sacrament of the Church is defined as “an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace” (*Baltimore Catechism*). The Seven Sacraments of the Church are: Baptism; Confirmation; Holy Eucharist; Penance (or Reconciliation); Holy Orders; Matrimony; and the Anointing of the Sick.
- ❖ **The Sacrament of Baptism** is the first sacrament of Christian initiation. Through Baptism, a person becomes a member of the Church, God’s adopted child, and an heir to the kingdom of heaven. Baptism removes original sin *from us* -- and it transmits *to us* the divine life of sanctifying grace that Adam lost and Christ died to win back *for us*. It is therefore Baptism that enables us to start living the supernatural life. Along with sanctifying grace, the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity are infused into the soul at Baptism.
- ❖ Baptism is a necessary sacrament because a person cannot be saved without it (CCC 1257). The sanctifying grace it brings acts like a “passport” for the soul by verifying that heaven is its native home, and by giving it the capacity to live the supernatural life. That is why the Church strongly encourages the prompt baptism of infants -- ideally within a few weeks of birth if not sooner. Failure to have a child baptized without good reason is a grave injustice to the child. We pray for all who have not been baptized, that they might receive Baptism as soon as possible.
- ❖ Once we are baptized, we are responsible for preserving divine grace and reinforcing it through reception of the other sacraments. We must take care never to lose it through mortal sin, which destroys one’s relationship with God.
- ❖ As the second sacrament of Christian initiation, **the Sacrament of Confirmation** perfects the grace of Baptism and seals it with the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Confirmation, the Holy Spirit comes to strengthen our Christian faith and to help us bear witness to it in both our words and our deeds.
- ❖ Promised by Christ in His final instructions to the Apostles before His Ascension, the Holy Spirit came upon them ten days later on Pentecost, when they were gathered together in prayer with Our Lady. The gift of the Holy Spirit transformed the Apostles from timid men into fearless preachers of the Gospel.
- ❖ **The Holy Eucharist** is the third sacrament of Christian initiation and the greatest of all the sacraments. It is the “source and summit of the Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium* 11).
- ❖ The Holy Eucharist is a miracle by which we are nourished with the sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, of Jesus Christ. We receive this nourishment under the appearance of bread and wine at Holy Communion during Mass. A few minutes earlier when they were consecrated, the bread and wine were changed, except in their appearance, into the actual Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, of Jesus Christ (a mystery called *transubstantiation*).
- ❖ During Holy Mass, Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is renewed in an “unbloody manner”. Though thousands of Masses are said around the world each day, only one sacrifice is offered -- the one Our Lord made of His life on Calvary to redeem us. The Mass is an event that overcomes the boundaries of space and time. People in many different places at different



Moms Transmit the Faith

times come into direct contact at Mass with the one perfect act of love that Christ made on the Cross.

- ❖ The Church has established some guidelines for receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion. Catholics are required to receive Communion at least once a year during the Easter season; but we are encouraged to receive Communion more frequently -- even daily if we can -- as a means to strengthen our spiritual life. We must be in the state of grace to receive Communion; if we are aware of having committed a mortal sin, it is necessary to confess it and obtain forgiveness before taking Communion. And we are called to fast for one hour before receiving Communion out of respect for Our Lord. After Communion, Christ remains present within us for several minutes, so we are encouraged to spend that time in prayerful thanksgiving.
- ❖ The Blessed Sacrament is usually kept in a vessel called the *ciborium* and safely reserved in the tabernacle, where Our Lord waits for us to visit Him at any time.
- ❖ **The Sacrament of Penance** -- also called Reconciliation -- is the sacrament of healing and conversion. Just as medicine helps remove sickness from our bodies when we are ill, the Sacrament of Penance brings us forgiveness when we have offended God through our personal sins. As a threat to the life of our souls, we must see that sin is more dangerous to us than physical disease, which merely threatens the life of our bodies.
- ❖ Even though Baptism cleanses us of original sin, the fact that it was ever there has left our nature weak and susceptible to personal sin. In this way, original sin is like pneumonia, which even when medicine has helped take it away, leaves the body weak and susceptible to further sickness. The susceptibility (or inclination) to sin is called *concupiscence*. It causes us to have to struggle to carry out God's Will. In this effort, we often fail, but God understands human weakness and our need for mercy. In Confession, He forgives us and grants us healing grace so that we may rise from our falls, do penance for our sins, and begin again to fight for holiness.
- ❖ Priests have been given the power in Confession to forgive sins in God's name. Before going to Confession, we should prepare ourselves by making an examination of conscience, asking the Holy Spirit to help us see and acknowledge our sins. A good Confession is contrite, concrete, complete, simple, and sincere.
- ❖ Through **the Sacrament of Holy Orders**, "the [saving] mission Christ entrusted to His Apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time" (CCC 1536).
- ❖ When a baptized man receives the Sacrament of Holy Orders, he becomes a member of the clergy and accepts responsibility for helping his diocesan bishop or religious superior discharge the spiritual goods of the Church. There are three levels in Holy Orders: deacon; priest; and bishop.
- ❖ A deacon can preach homilies and teach in the name of the Church, perform baptisms, and witness marriages. While sharing in those duties, an ordained priest is additionally responsible for offering the sacrifice of the Mass, forgiving sins in God's name in the Sacrament of Penance, and administering the Anointing of the Sick. Some priests belong to a religious order, while secular priests serve in organized territories called dioceses. A select number of priests receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders in its fullest degree by being ordained as bishops. Every diocese has a bishop as its chief pastor¹. As such, he is responsible for the

¹ Sometimes the bishop of a diocese is given the chance to share some of his burdens with one or more assistant bishops who may be assigned to him. These assistant bishops are called "auxiliary" bishops.



spiritual well-being of the souls he serves -- like a shepherd who watches over his flock. While sharing in all the duties of a priest, a bishop is also the ordinary minister of the Sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Orders.

- ❖ In the Church's Latin rite, a priest renounces marriage and promises to live in celibacy to imitate the fact that Christ's own priesthood was exercised in celibacy. Secondly, his vow of chastity also allows him to be fully available to attend to the needs of the people. Since Jesus founded the Church's ordained ministry by calling twelve men to be His Apostles, members of the clergy, too, are all male. The priesthood is a special vocation -- a calling to a life of sacrifice and service to the Church. There is today a great need for generous responses from men who find themselves called to the priesthood.
- ❖ In **the Sacrament of Matrimony**, "an intimate community of life and love" (*Gaudium et Spes* 48) is permanently and indissolubly established between a man and a woman until they are parted by death.
- ❖ A marriage is "by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring" (*Codex Iuris Canonici* Can. 1055, s.1). One of a married person's fundamental duties is to help his or her spouse get to heaven. Also, the marriage bond is so strong that it causes man and woman to become "one flesh" capable of generating a family, a new social unit (Gen 2:24).
- ❖ It is good for a couple to prepare themselves for the Sacrament of Matrimony by receiving instruction through the "Pre-Cana" conference series, and by going to Confession beforehand. The marriage rite between baptized Catholics preferably takes place during the celebration of Holy Mass, as is the case with some of the other sacraments.
- ❖ An official representative of the Church (i.e. a bishop, priest, or deacon) must be a witness at the marriage ceremony; however, it is the married couple themselves who actually administer the sacrament to each other, first by consenting to the marriage vows (*form*), and then by consummating their marriage (*matter*).
- ❖ Matrimony transmits to the couple a sacramental grace from God that helps them grow together in love, especially through difficult times -- since marriage lasts "until death do us part".
- ❖ **The Anointing of the Sick** (formerly known as "Extreme Unction") used to be administered toward the end of someone's life to prepare him for a happy death. The "Last Rites" was its popular name. But in recent years, the Church has extended the Anointing of the Sick to any baptized person lying in danger of death from sickness, a serious operation, or old age.
- ❖ The suffering of sick people can have redemptive value both for themselves and for other people. The Anointing of the Sick helps them bear their sufferings with courage and hope, especially at the hour of death. If the patient recovers and then falls sick again, he can receive the sacrament again, and as many times as needed in the future.
- ❖ If circumstances allow, the Anointing of the Sick can be preceded by Confession and followed by reception of the Eucharist. In this context, the Eucharist is the last sacrament of the earthly journey, and as such is called "viaticum" -- for the "passing over" to eternal life (CCC1517).

